

Najib's 'cool' campaign a concern, Pakatan agrees
The Malaysian Insider
September 20, 2011
By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 20 — Pakatan Rakyat (PR) lawmakers have admitted that Datuk Seri Najib Razak's latest image makeover could pose as a threat and are now determined to peel back his new "cool" exterior to reveal the "cold prime minister" beneath.

Agreeing that Najib had upped the ante on them, the leaders are aiming to convince voters that the prime minister's latest round of reforms are "non-substantive", "cosmetic in nature" and a result of intense public and opposition pressure.

Pua said Najib's latest move is a threat to Pakatan Rakyat. — File pic

"It is certain that Najib is moving to swipe the middle Malaysia vote bank and given the amount of effort he is putting in, he will make some headway... there is no question that it is a threat to PR's attempt to win in the next general election," DAP national publicity secretary Tony Pua told The Malaysian Insider.

"I think it is important for PR to push through the message that beneath this new 'cool' exterior lies a very, very cold prime minister."

"He (Najib) is moving towards reforms, he has repealed the ISA and even though this is what the opposition has been pushing for all this time, he could sway some fence sitters," PAS MP Mujahid Yusof Rawa said.

Despite disagreeing that Najib had chalked a win with his new campaign, DAP Socialist Youth chief Anthony Loke admitted that such publicity stunts could work for "one or two years", which is all the prime minister needs to breeze through the next general election.

With this, the PR leaders agreed there was a need to gloss over the images of their own top leaders, particularly those of prime minister-designate Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng and Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim.

Pua described both Lim and Khalid as "workaholic" state administrators but said voters needed to be informed of both men's achievements versus Najib's "non-substantive reform promises" for the country.

"We need to put it out in the open, the achievements of PR states... we have workaholic mentris besar in Selangor and Penang, who are not corrupt and who are delivering value to the electorate," he said.

PKR vice-president Nurul Izzah Anwar pointed out that Malaysians were more concerned with action in the form of beneficial policies instead of popularity contests.

Mujahid said PR needs to intensify efforts to counter Najib's new move.

"As far as the reform announcements are concerned, my stand is still that the proof of the pie is in the eating. Until and unless parliamentarians from all sides are given access to the proposed changes to these laws, I remain cautiously optimistic," she said.

In what is seen as a run-up to the next polls, Najib stepped up his game recently when he

announced last week a raft of reforms to security and press laws and embarked on a new publicity campaign to shine his image. The campaign is undertaken by a team of notable strategists who include the experts behind Tony Blair's "New Labour" and Paul Stadlen, the former boss of APCO Malaysia.

As part of the Najib team's big push, it is also understood that multi-million ringgit funding has been worked out for a new website and to hire hundreds of people to promote "Brand Najib" and "Brand BN" on social media and other websites.

A new Najib — one who attends concerts and speaks of being "cool" — has already emerged despite the short time the "Blair team" has been working here.

"Yes, PR definitely needs to intensify efforts to counter this. Voters who are able to think would conclude that Najib's decision to repeal the ISA was a result of public pressure but those who do not want to think will simply say that he is a good PM... we need to reach out to these people," said Mujahid.

"We definitely need to be more savvy and find a way to feed home the message that a PR government is many times better than the BN government of the past and any potential BN government of the future," Pua concurred.

The PR leadership will meet tomorrow for its weekly council discussion and The Malaysian Insider understands that Najib's latest machinations will be among the key topics deliberated.

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